

all the little lights by TolkienGirl

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Summary: When El found the lights the first time, she thought they would shock her. (Christmas fic, post season finale. Angst. Slight Mileven. Byers family. Hopper.)

all the little lights

A/N: Time for angsty Christmas fic!

Her hands shake, just a little.

"Mom?" Jonathan is at her side, and he reaches for the lights.

"It's just weird. I'm fine. It's weird having them—you know, not on the wall. Using them like a normal family." And if her smile is a little crooked, that's because it's always been. It's a happy smile.

Will is scribbling meticulously with his colored pencil, and the fir tree may be a little lopsided, but it's *theirs*.

...

When El found the lights the first time, she thought they would shock her.

"Can't," Mike explained. "They're not plugged in." He tried to breathe when she let him take her hand and guide her fingers over them.

"What are they?"

"Christmas lights."

"Christmas?" Her eyebrows wrinkled.

He'd never heard anyone sound the word out like that, unfamiliar and uncertain.

"It's the best part of the year."

El was silent, watchful. The other guys sometimes thought her staring was a little creepy, but Mike didn't think that at all. Hey, when you looked at stars, they kept shining. They didn't blink and fade—they were steady and bright, and that's what El's eyes are like.

"We put them around a tree," he said. "And then they glow—like stars."

El's mouth fell open, and she let out a shuddery breath. "C-can I see?"

There were lots of outlets in the basement. Dad once had a workshop down here. Now they just used it for games.

"Ready?"

She nodded.

A blossom of color, and El gasped. "Stars, Mike!"

"Yeah," he said. And put his hands under hers, under the lights, because why not? "Stars."

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"Are these the lights?" Will asks. He doesn't like to talk about it all, much. But.

Joyce slips her arms around him, to remind them both that she can. "They are."

"I like them better on the tree," Will whispers, but she can feel him relax against her.

"Me too, babe. Me too."

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Hopper leaves a lantern in the woods. Thinks of putting a red bow on it, or something.

Thinks better of it.

She wouldn't know what to make of it, anyway.

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"Mike?"

"Yeah?" He's always daydreaming these days. And everyone knows about some piece of it, but almost no one knows the whole of it, and he just can't feel like anyone understands.

He wonders if it's cold, where she is. He wonders if she's anywhere at all.

"You want to put up the lights?"

It's the best part of the year.

Mike rubs the sleeve of his sweater over his eyes, one-two quick, and dutifully heads down to the basement. He hates coming down here now, but there's not enough reason to argue it, always—he can't say why. Or he won't.

They're curled up like a tangle of vines in the same old box.

He will string them round the tree in a minute, but first—he hurries impulsively to an outlet, fumbles with the plug. His hands shake, just a little.

The lights glow like stars.